



Pearson

Anoushka Shankar: *Breathing Under Water* – ‘Burn’, ‘Breathing Under Water’ and ‘Easy’ (For component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

The composer

Anoushka Shankar was born in 1981, in London, and is the daughter of the famous sitar player Ravi Shankar. She was brought up in London, Delhi and California, where she attended high school. She studied sitar with her father from the age of 7, began playing tampura in his concerts at 10, and gave her first solo sitar performances at 13. She signed her first recording contract at 16 and her first three album releases were of Indian Classical performances.

Her first cross-over/fusion album – *Rise* – was released in 2005 and was nominated for a Grammy, in the Contemporary World Music category. Her albums since *Breathing Under Water* have continued to explore the connections between Indian music and other styles.

She has collaborated with some major artists – Sting, Nithin Sawhney, Joshua Bell and George Harrison, as well as with her father, Ravi Shankar, and her half-sister, Norah Jones. She has also performed around the world as a Classical sitar player – playing her father’s sitar concertos with major orchestras.

The piece

Breathing Under Water was Anoushka Shankar’s fifth album, and her second of original fusion music.

Her main collaborator was Utkarsha (Karsh) Kale, an Indian musician and composer and co-founder of Tabla Beat Science – an Indian band exploring ambient, drum & bass and electronica in a Hindustani music setting. Kale contributes dance music textures and technical expertise, as well as playing tabla, drums and guitar on the album.

There are guest artists on the album (Sting sings on ‘Sea Dreamer’, Ravi Shankar plays on (and co-wrote) ‘Oceanic (Parts 1 and 2)’ and Norah Jones sings on (and co-wrote) ‘Easy’).

In addition there are contributions from other artists (the Bollywood string arranger Salim Merchant, New York producer and dance musician Johnathan Dagan (J.viewz) and vocalists Noa Lembersky (‘Burn’) and Sunidhi Chauhan (‘Breathing Under Water’).

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The album grew out of improvisation sessions between Shankar, Kale and the Delhi musician and producer Gaurav Raina and was recorded in New York, California and India and released in 2007.

The album does contain some programmed (sequenced) tracks, but there is much live playing on the album, particularly of Indian instruments.

Anoushka Shankar has said of the album 'I felt I could push further in riskier ways for me ... Working with a string orchestra, having vocals in English, or using conventional Western song structures and chords.'

There are 13 tracks on the album. Those not studied are: 'Slither' – electronica and traditional; 'Sea Dreamer' – comes immediately after 'Breathing Under Water', and shares much material with the album's title track; 'Ghost story' – Indian lyrics and a more traditional feel; 'PD7' – contrasts an almost classical *alap* opening with a dance music grooves and virtuosic sitar and vocal improvisations; 'Little Glass Folk' – sitar solos and a 'waltz' feel; 'Abyss' – dance beats, wordless and English vocals, bansuri solo; 'Perfect Rain' – male Indian vocals; 'Oceanic 1+2' – Ravi Shankar adds sitar; and 'Reprise' – shortened version of ideas from 'Breathing Under Water'/'Sea Dreamer'.

Performing forces and their handling

Breathing Under Water uses a large number of musical resources from the Indian Classical and Western pop/rock traditions (instruments/voices in **bold** appear on one of the set tracks).

Indian instruments/voices

- **Sitar** – long-necked plucked string instrument, with movable frets and sympathetic strings, played with a metal plectrum
- **Tabla** – pair of hand drums with an amazing range of sounds
- **Sarangi** – string instrument with three bowed strings and over 30 sympathetic strings
- **Indian-style classical vocals**
- **Indian percussion** – manjira – Indian finger cymbals
- Bansuri (Indian flute)
- Veena (plucked string instrument)
- Sarod (fretless plucked string instrument).

Western instruments/voices

- **String orchestra (the Bombay Cinematic Strings)**
- **Solo cello**
- **Programmed/sampled drum patterns**
- **Piano**
- **Pop/R&B style vocals**
- Bass guitar
- **Guitar**
- **Keyboard 'pad' sounds.**

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The success of this album is due, in part, to the skill with which these very disparate forces are handled and mixed together. Indian melodic instruments tend to have solo roles, or are in dialogue with the vocals. Indian percussion is integrated into the overall rhythmic texture, whether programmed or recorded. The Western rhythm section instruments – bass guitar, drum kit, electric guitar – are not used prominently on the set tracks. Live string sections feature on two out of three set tracks.

Features of interest on individual tracks

‘Burn’

- Uses a mix of instruments/voices in quite an involved soundscape:
 - English vocals (New York vocalist Noa Lembersky)
 - Orchestral strings (arranged by Bollywood composer/arranger Salim Merchant)
 - Sitar and sarangi
 - Dance beats mixed with Indian percussion (manjira – finger-cymbals)
 - Synthesised bass and analog-style lead synthesiser lines.

The sitar plays a long solo in the introduction, beginning in the low register, rising towards bars 22–24 and falling again from bars 25–29. Later it plays in dialogue with the vocals in verses 2 and 3 and in bars 86–93 plays in dialogue with the string section.

The sarangi plays a repetitive line in the bridge between chorus and verse 2. (bar 46-53)

The vocals (Noa Lembersky) are in a soulful Jazz/R&B style. They are mainly stepwise and syllabic with a range of less than an octave. They are doubled in thirds in the chorus and in verse 2, with improvised riffing in the final chorus.

Orchestral strings play a very important role in the song, mostly with slow-moving chordal textures. In bars 3–4 and bars 14–15 melodic figures are prominent. The whole section (bars 3–21) is repeated underneath verse 2 and the instrumental. There is a dialogue with the sitar in bars 86–93. The cello solo brings the song to an end.

Analog-style synthesiser lines include repeated bass pedal C#s with wide portamento (bars 22–24) and mid-range ostinato-like lines that underlay the chorus and bridge sections (also with portamento). (bars 38 and 46)

Programmed percussion beats are mixed with Indian finger-cymbals. Simple bass/snare patterns occur in the verse, with manjira semiquaver ideas. It becomes more active in the chorus with demisemiquaver hi-hat lines. (bar 38)

‘Breathing Under Water’

- Strings, sitar, wordless vocals and keyboards.
- Sitar is the solo instrument here, playing a line based on the vocal line of ‘Sea Dreamer’:
 - Melodic line is decorated by ornaments (*alankara*)
 - *meend* (slides)

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- *kan* (grace notes)
- *andolan* (vibrato)
- *gamak* (mordents/trills).
- The melody is paraphrased three times, twice in the upper register (*tar saphak*) and once in the lower register (*mandra saphak*).
- The wordless vocal line (sung by Sunidhi Chauhan) is used, initially, to link into the second main solo section, then low down as a harmonic filler in the second section, as a high descant to the third section and as a final resolution.
- The string section is used very simply here. In the first two sections playing mid-range block chords. In the third section, where the sitar drops into its lower register, the strings play in a higher register with a little more melodic interest.

‘Easy’

The sitar plays solo in introduction, then an articulated pedal D \flat during the first part of V1/2. Later it works in dialogue with the vocal ‘I know’ (bars 21–33). It takes the solo line in the instrumental (bars 32–41) until it returns in dialogue with the vocals until the end of the song.

The guitar provides plucked accompaniment with ostinato-like patterns.

The piano is subtle and understated throughout, adding high chords to verse 2 (repeat of bar 9), an inverted pedal D \flat in octaves at bars 27–28 and an arpeggio figure in the last two bars.

The vocals, sung by Norah Jones’ are relaxed in R&B style. They sit in a mid- to low tessitura with a range of a tenth (A \flat –C). They are mainly syllabic, but with some melismas (e.g. ‘real’ bar 13, V2).

Other sounds used are a synth bass, to emphasise the guitar ostinato lines from verse 2 onwards and electronic drum patterns.

Structure

For a musician brought up with the much more ‘open- ended’ structures of Indian Classical music, Anoushka Shankar embraces Western song structures in these three tracks, making use of familiar structures such as verse and chorus, bridge, instrumental, introduction and coda. Repeated chord sequences are also at the heart of these songs, although key contrast does not play a major part.

‘Burn’

Introduction 1	Bars 1–21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitar prominent from the beginning • String material bars 3–21 used verbatim later in song • Slow moving and sometimes unclear pulse – similar to <i>alap</i> section of an Indian classical performance
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Introduction 2	Bars 22–29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rhythmic – adds percussion and synth bass
Verse 1	Bars 30–37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light accompaniment emphasises vocal line
Chorus	Bars 38–45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated vocal ‘hook’ – ‘Dance with me’
Bridge	Bars 46–53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarangi solo: repeated phrases over continuation of chorus accompaniment
Verse 2	Bars 54–61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocals now in thirds • String material from bars 3–9 underlies this section
Verse 2 extension	Bars 62–65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New vocal idea ‘your eyes close around me...’ • String material from bars 10–13
Bridge	Bars 66–73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitar solo • Verse extension material • String material bars 14–21
Link 1	Bars 74–77	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitar and strings • Cymbal roll leads into next section
Verse 3	Bars 78–85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue between vocals and sitar
Link 2	Bars 86–93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue between strings and sitar • Repeated imperfect cadences • Rather like ‘breakdown’ section of dance music
Verse 3 extension	Bars 94–97	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual build-up of texture and excitement
Chorus	Bars 98–104	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy texture with three vocal lines, string countermelody, sitar and rhythm
Coda	Bars 105–110	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of key • Flute and cello solos round off song

- The repeat of the string material from the introduction (bars 3–21) during bars 54–77 binds together a number of small sections, creating a more unified central section.

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'Breathing Under Water'

- This track is an instrumental paraphrase of the song 'Sea Dreamer', which appears immediately after it on the album. It therefore acts as an extended introduction.
- While the exact order of elements is different, much of the sitar line is near-identical.

Verse 1	Bars 1–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like 'Sea Dreamer', there is no introduction • Decorated version of 'Sea Dreamer' melody
Refrain 1	Bars 9–17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortened version of vocal refrain
Middle 8	Bars 18–33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of key to modal A major • Retains sitar material from original song, but omits vocal section
Link	Bars 34–36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Surprise' A minor chord • Wordless vocal line links into pick-up of next verse
Verse 2	Bars 36 ⁴ –44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second phrase varied • Wordless vocals added
Refrain 2	Bars 45–53 ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See bars 9–17 but bars 50 is a tone higher than bar 14
Verse 3	Bars 53 ² –61 ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melody now an octave lower in sitar • Vocal lines in higher register act as a counterpoint to sitar
Refrain 3	Bars 61 ² –68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melodic variations continue but basic contours still followed • Vocal descant bars 64–66 echoes first phrase of melody
Coda	69–77	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flattened third (F\flat) and seventh (C\flat) used prominently in sitar line • Vocal decoration of final chord with 2–4–3 shape

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'Easy'

This is in many ways the most conventionally structured song of the three.

Introduction	Bars 1–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four-bar sitar melody, repeated with slight variations
Verse 1 / 2	Bars 9–20	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Piano and synth bass added in second verse
Link	Bars 21–33	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sitar solo links the verses• Two- to three-part vocals 'I know' over sitar solo
Instrumental	Bars 34–41	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electronic drums added• Sitar solo continues
Middle 8	Bars 42–49	
Verse 3	Bars 50–58	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New vocal material, in dialogue with sitar
Coda	Bars 59–63	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocals drop out• Sitar and piano figures end the song

Texture

Indian Classical music traditionally employs three textural elements:

- Melodic instrument or voice
- Rhythmic accompaniment
- Drone.

Although the first two of these elements are clearly present in all three songs, a drone is only evident in two (the recurring C# pedal in much of 'Burn' and the sitar pedal notes during verse 1 and 2 of 'Easy').

Otherwise, as with most songs, the function of the texture is to support and emphasise the melody. The predominant texture is **homophony** with clear tune and accompaniment textures in all three songs.

Features of textural interest in each song are as follows.

'Burn'

- The most complex song in textural terms.

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- Bars 1–21 is essentially homophonic, but there is just enough melodic interest and independence in the string parts to question who is accompanying whom, given the improvised nature of the sitar line and the carefully composed string parts.
- Synth bass articulated tonic pedal begins in bar 22 and is used extensively.
- Chorus section (bar 38) combines melodic elements, polyphonically (vocal hook and lead synth semiquaver line with the continued bass pedal).
- The sarangi line creates a more contrapuntal texture with the continuing accompaniment textures (bar 46).
- Verse 2 has more polyphonic elements that interact (vocals in thirds, dialogue with sitar and string material from the introduction).
- ‘Breakdown’ section at bar 86 reduces texture to sitar and strings only, in dialogue.
- Final chorus has many layers combined (interlocking vocal lines, sitar figures, one-bar string countermelody and drone bass and percussion).
- Gentle close with homophonically accompanied flute and cello solos.

‘Breathing Under Water’

- Bars 1–33 sitar accompanied by (mostly) homorhythmic block chords.
- Bars 34–38 short polyphonic dialogue between vocals and sitar.
- Bars 53–67 voice provides descant in polyphony with the sitar line.

‘Easy’

- The focus is very much on the vocal line here.
- Guitar accompaniment plays the same sort of material throughout (syncopated bass/tenor range textures with an ostinato-like rhythm).
- Piano chords and synth bass lines are added to the guitar as the piece progresses.
- Homophonic textures feature strongly.
- More complex textures include vocal harmonies in dialogue with sitar lines (bars 21–33) and polyphonic dialogue between sitar and vocals in the middle 8. (bar 42)

Tonality

There is no obvious use of either strict Indian Classical raga or functional tonality here. An Asian–inflected form of non-functional tonality is employed. The tonality is always clear, but is often modally inflected in the choice of chords and progressions.

There is little evidence of tonality being used to define structure here – there is only one example of modulation in the three songs – the change of key in the second section of ‘Breathing Under Water’.

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‘Burn’

- In C# minor – not quite strict, in diatonic terms, but with enough use of the raised seventh (B#) to approach the feeling of a true minor key.
- The articulated bass anchors the piece to C# until the final bars.
- Coda slips through A minor and F major chords to come to rest on an inconclusive D⁵ chord – one lacking a third.

‘Breathing Under Water’

- D \flat major for the majority of the piece.
- A tertiary modulation D \flat (=C#) to a Lydian-inflected A major (bars 18–34).

‘Easy’

- In a transposed Mixolydian mode (white notes from G to G) on D \flat .
- The Indian equivalent of this is Rag Khamaj.
- Consistently flattened seventh (C \flat).
- No key changes.

Harmony

All three songs employ Western-style chords and chord progressions in preference to the Indian Classical raga and drone, however, the chords chosen and their use is very far from conventional functional diatonic harmony. There are few cadences but there is use of repeated chord sequences, usually two or four bars in length. Some songs contain passages of static harmony and the chord palate is widened by the use of **added note and extension chords**, **sus chords** and **slash chords**. The resulting richness of harmony can result in a form of **pandiatonicism**, where the harmonies are built freely from any note of the scale.

‘Burn’

The harmony in the opening section is very rich, with almost every bar containing added notes, extension chords or chords with four different notes.

The harmonic effect here is rather static, as the chords share notes and there is nearly always a tonic C# sounding bar 3 C#m^{add4}/G# – (G#, C#, E, F#); bar 4 A^{maj7(#4)} – (A, C#, D#, G#); and bar 6 C#m^(add9) – (C#, D#, G#, E).

Dissonances are freely used, but are not prepared or resolved in a conventional way.

Some feeling of a diatonic C# minor is given by the frequent use of the leading note B#, particularly in the sitar line.

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There are dominant chords here (G# major), but the effect is diluted either by the simultaneous sounding of the suspended fourth (bar 8 – the chord is also a seventh in third inversion) or by the omission of the third altogether (G#⁵) in bar 15.

The first section of the introduction ends, bars 21–22 with an almost classical **cadential** ⁶/₄ progression, moving from C#/G# to G#^{sus4} (but the sus4 is not resolved).

Bars 30–46 **Static harmony** here, made up of a number of elements, a C# articulated pedal in the synth bass, a lead vocal line using the first six notes of the C# minor scale and lead synth lines focusing on the notes C#, F# and G#. The effect in this section is not unlike that of Classical Indian raga, where all notes of the raga can be heard against the drone.

A more periodic chord progression is used in verse 3 (bar 78) – C#^{sus2} – A^{maj7} – C#m/G# – F#m^{6/9} – A^(#4) – B^(add4).

The most conventional series of progressions is used at bar 86, with repeated VI–V progressions in C# minor, giving a strong feeling of **imperfect cadences** (but with very ‘un-Bachian’ parallels!).

The coda veers away from the tonic key abruptly, using the unrelated chords of A minor and F major seventh to find its way to D major, but, as ever, things are fluid, as the final D⁵ chord contains no third.

‘Breathing Under Water’

Although clearly in D^b, there are very few examples of unembellished D^b chords – most have added notes. The opening section oscillates between B^bm⁷ and A^b chords (VI–V), coming to rest (inconclusively) on a D^b^{sus4} chord at bar 17.

Bars 18–34 are in a modally inflected A, with adjacent chords of B, A and G#m⁷ being used in various orders. This section also uses slash chords (B/A bar 25), major seventh chords (A^{maj7} bar 29) and a diminished chord (D#^o/F# bar 26).

The coda section makes greater use of the subdominant chord (G^b) and its minor form, with repeated IVm–I progressions in the closing bars (this variation on the plagal cadence is common in pop music). The final chord is decorated with a 2–4–3 shape in the voice.

‘Easy’

This song derives its harmonies from the notes of the **transposed Mixolydian mode** and as this scale contains no ‘true’ leading notes (Cs) there are no progressions involving the dominant chord.

The harmony avoids primary chord progressions and cadences and the song is dominated by a three-chord progression, heard first in bar 9 – G^b^{sus2}/B^b – C^b^{sus2} – D^b^{sus4}. The use of inversion here gives a strong, stepwise bass (B^b, C^b, D^b).

The Middle 8 section (bars 42–49) re-orders this sequence.

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As in other modal pieces – the flattened leading note chord ($bVII$) or **subtonic** acts as a **substitute dominant**.

Many of the sus4 chords here also sound the third at the same time, creating a dissonance.

The song ends on an unresolved D_b^{sus4} chord.

Melody

The character of the melodic lines varies here. The **sitar lines** tend to be ornate and quite complex, containing many of the traditional ornamental figures of Indian raga (see Performing Forces section above). This reflects Anoushka Shankar's own musical roots. The lead vocal lines, however, are Western in style, reflecting the R&B and dance music backgrounds of Norah Jones ('Easy') and Noa Lembersky ('Burn').

'Burn'

The opening **sitar solo** sounds very much like the improvised **alap** section of a Classical raga. It begins in the lower register (mandra saphak), then explores the notes of the scale, including $B\#$ s, to establish the key securely.

The passage in bars 10–14 features the use of thirds. A rising sixth figure at bar 6 appears again towards the end of the introduction (bar 26).

Typically it includes slides, trills and grace notes.

The **lead vocal line** is sung by New York singer Noa Lembersky. The **verse** features a **descending sequential idea** – $G\#-A-F\#$ and $F\#-G\#-E$ – and also uses oscillations between adjacent notes. The **chorus** uses three-note repeated phrases using a minor third or stepwise movement.

The **sarangi** melody in the bridge section features a repeated idea with prominent use of the note $B\#$.

The **verse extension idea** (bars 62–65) features a distinctive upwards fifth.

The $G\#-A-F\#$ idea from the verse is used as the basis for the melodic material from bar 86. (see strings)

The syncopated string idea first heard at bar 14 is repeated later, and is developed into the one-bar countermelody in the strings during the final chorus (bar 98).

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'Breathing Under Water'

The **sitar line** here is a **melodic paraphrase** or **variation** on the vocal line sung by Sting on 'Sea Dreamer'. The line is very ornamented, in keeping with tradition, with slides, shakes, mordents, trills and other melodic decorations – Meends (slides), kan (grace notes) and gamak (mordents/trills).

Despite this, the contours, and the phrase structure, of the original song are audible throughout, with much use of stepwise movement, and of repeated **anacrusic** phrases.

The passage from bar 18–33 is not related to the vocal melody from 'Sea Dreamer', but is the material played underneath the vocals in the Middle 8 section of the song. The melody here ranges freely over the instrument, in arching up and down phrases.

The vocal line is mainly stepwise, with occasional ornaments, but in general is less ornate than the sitar part.

'Easy'

Again, there is a stylistic tension between the florid sitar lines and the relaxed style of Norah Jones' vocals.

The melodies are based on the transposed **Mixolydian mode** – its equivalent is **Rag Khamaj**.

The **sitar opening** uses a four-bar melody, repeated with slight variations, which works downwards from the flattened seventh (C \flat) to an octave below.

The **vocal line** features a relatively restricted range, major seconds (bars 8–9), pentatonic shapes (bars 10–11, 14–15) and minor thirds (bars 11⁴, 12⁴).

The **Middle 8** vocal line includes downward movement, with phrases spanning up to an octave.

The final vocal phrase extends downwards to the lower dominant to span a ninth.

Rhythm, tempo and metre

The rhythmic style is entirely Western in origin here, with no apparent influence of the cycles of **Indian tala**. All three songs are in 4/4 metre.

'Burn'

Set at a medium tempo ($\text{♩}=80$), it begins with rhythmically 'abstract' sitar phrases (triplets, syncopations) against a periodic string accompaniment. More active string lines are used at bar 14 with the use of syncopations. A strong rhythmic drive is set up in the drums and manjira (snare backbeat) in the verse.

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Demisemiquaver hi-hat in the chorus increases the sense of excitement. Syncopated vocal lines counterpointed by semiquaver lead synth lines are found in the chorus. Sarangi lines use syncopations, anticipations and lombardic rhythms.

'Breathing Under Water'

There is a fast medium tempo throughout ($\text{♩}=120$), with a clear sense of pulse.

The **sitar line** is rhythmically flexible, with syncopations, triplets and quintuplets but maintains its connection to 'Sea Dreamer'. Each phrase is **anacrusic** – beginning on the second crotchet or quaver beat. The **accompaniment** moves in semibreves and minims, on the beat, supporting the freedom of the sitar line.

'Easy'

A medium tempo $\text{♩}=84$, until the last four bars slow down again.

Syncopated accompaniment and vocal style (bars 5–6) with a flexible and complex sitar line.

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